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*Developments in Indochina*

State Dept. review completed

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

*(Information as of 1500)*

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SOUTH VIETNAM

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The Communists are intensifying their efforts to entice people into areas under their control. Some sharp fighting may be in store for the delta in the Seven Mountains area and Chuong Thien Province. President Thieu has ordered his local officials to think about new ways to win popular support for the government.

CAMBODIA

4

The insurgents are once again attacking Route 2 and the east bank of the Mekong.

LAOS

5

Military activity is at its lowest level since the cease-fire.

SOUTH VIETNAM

The Communists appear to be intensifying civic action programs to attract people into areas under their control. [REDACTED] the Viet Cong in widely scattered provinces have been ordered to refurbish roadways, markets, schools, and administrative facilities, and to provide temporary or permanent housing where needed. In some areas, the Communists plan to offer funds and equipment to help new settlers make a living, and in other areas they plan to stress land reform and redevelopment measures. As yet, the magnitude and extent of resources the Communists are putting into this effort are not apparent. In the short run, at least, the Communists are unlikely to be able to develop a program of sufficient scope to achieve much success.

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[REDACTED] the Communists, with an eye to future elections, are trying to get people to move into Communist zones. [REDACTED] the Communists have moved several hundred people into thinly populated areas in some of the northern provinces to till the land and provide the Viet Cong with a ready-made electorate.

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[REDACTED] In Tay Ninh and Binh Long provinces, north of Saigon, the Communists reportedly have resettled several hundred Vietnamese civilians who had been residing on rubber plantations in Cambodia as well as some from government-held areas in South Vietnam. [REDACTED]

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The Military Situation

Fighting is generally light throughout the country, but some fairly sharp battles are under way in the delta. In Chau Doc Province, the Communists have established artillery emplacements in the western area of the Seven Mountains and are resisting government efforts to recapture lost outposts in the area. The South Vietnamese are persisting, however, and US Embassy officers on the scene report that a substantial battle could be shaping up. Communist units are maintaining moderate pressure in Chuong Thien Province's southern districts of Long My and Kien Thien. The US Consul General for the delta estimates that four enemy regiments are concentrated in the area and that several government outposts are virtually isolated. The Communist units appear to be trying to protect or expand their base areas and logistic routes.

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Thieu Calls for Better Government Performance

President Thieu, citing the possibility of early elections with the Viet Cong, is urging his administration to improve its performance. In a meeting with province chiefs and other senior officials this week, Thieu stated that elections might come as early as six months after the cease-fire, and called for several steps to win more popular support. The President stressed the need to wipe out corruption and administrative inefficiency at the local level, and said he was considering the resumption of some village council elections, which were suspended last year during the Communist offensive. He also called for stronger efforts to improve the economy and to deal with the refugee problem. While Thieu probably believes that there is

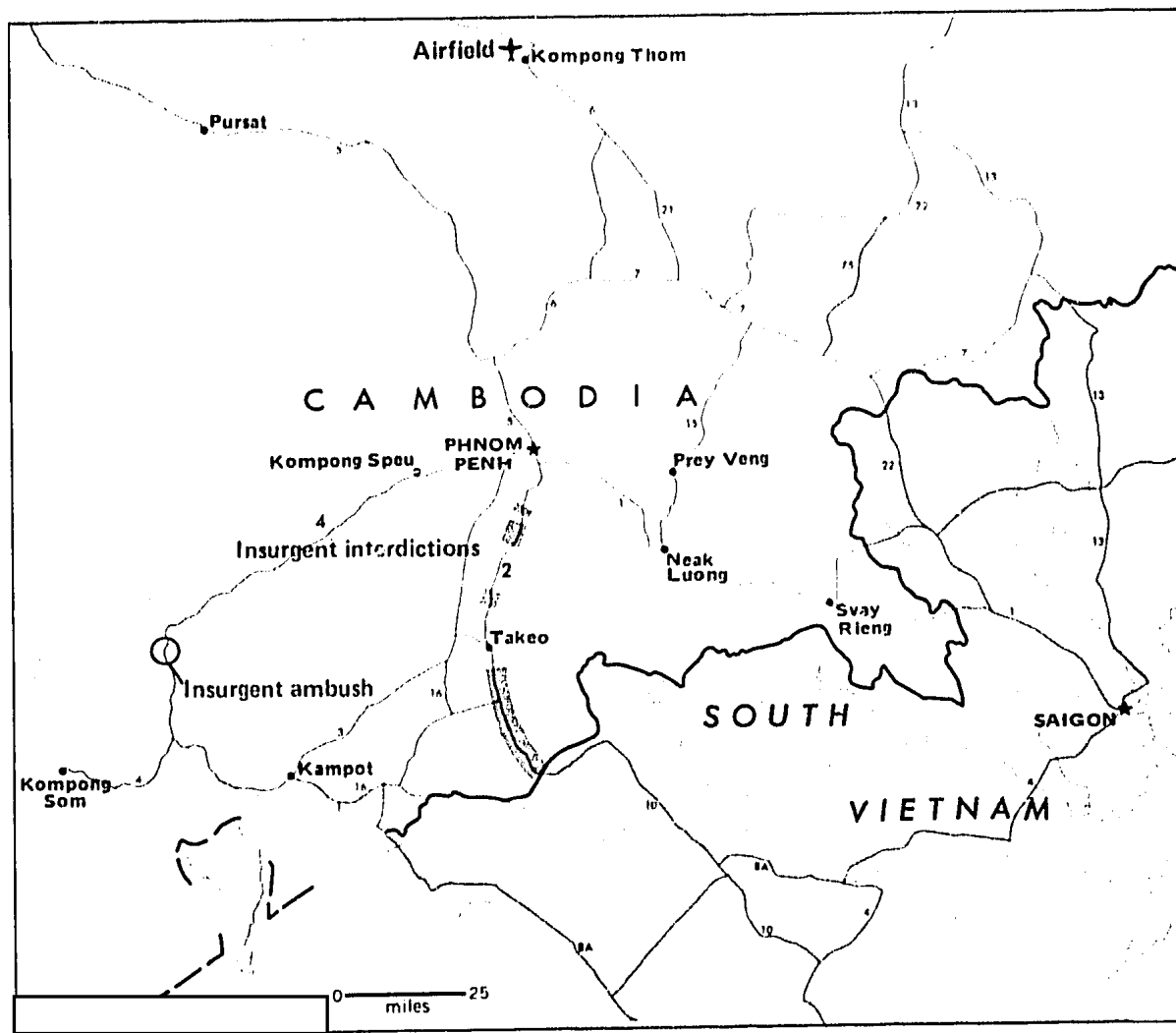
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little prospect that arrangements for early elections with Communist participation can be agreed upon, he may well think these measures are worthwhile in any case.

Thieu reiterated familiar themes in calling for efforts to counter the Viet Cong. He said there must be a "political consolidation" by means of the Democracy Party and the new popular front. The President also spoke of a "military consolidation," thus adding to earlier information that reductions in the armed forces are being studied. He said that regular forces probably could not be reduced this year. To pave the way for later reductions, militia forces--in particular, the Popular Forces and the People's Self Defense Forces, which are less expensive to maintain--should first be strengthened. Finally, Thieu again called for an end to disorderly demonstrations against Vietnamese Communist delegations to the Joint Military Commission.

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CAMBODIA

Khmer insurgent troops on 8 March launched a fresh series of attacks against government positions along Route 2 south of Phnom Penh. The Cambodians lost one position on the highway about 20 miles north of Takeo, but withstood heavy pressure against five other positions. The insurgents now occupy three sections of Route 2 between Phnom Penh and Takeo, and almost all of the highway between Takeo and the South Vietnam border. Brigadier General Lon Non has been given command of the government operation to reopen Route 2 to Takeo. Cambodian air support, not US, will be used to back up the attacking forces.

The insurgents are also continuing to attack government positions along the east bank of the Mekong. The government lost three outposts some 15 miles south of Neak Luong to the insurgents on 8 March, and seven other government positions along the river's eastern edge were shelled.

Elsewhere, a government patrol was ambushed on Route 4 about 55 miles northeast of the port of Kompong Som on 7 March. The highway has been closed temporarily at that point. North of Phnom Penh, the government clearing operation around the airfield at Kompong Thom has been completed. The first cargo plane to use the airstrip since early last December landed on 8 March.

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LAOS

On 8 March military activity on the ground dropped to its lowest level since the cease-fire came into effect. Four minor incidents were reported in the south and none in the north. Despite the lack of combat, Lao Air Force T-28s flew 29 sorties.

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